

Six months into the floods

Resetting Pakistan's priorities through reconstruction

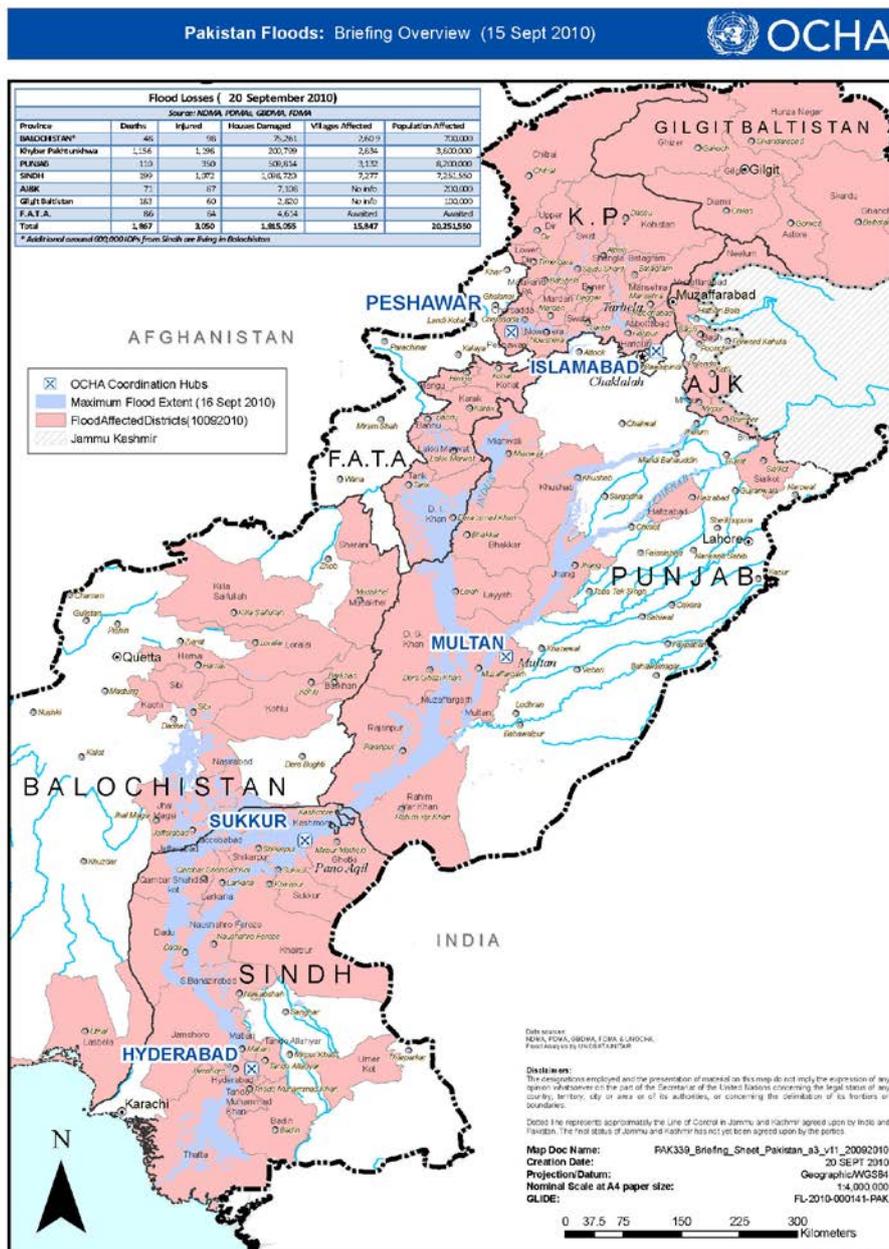
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A farmer from Thatta standing in her flooded field. Copyright: Caroline Gluck/Oxfam.

The monsoon floods that began in Pakistan in July 2010 caused a colossal disaster. Thanks to the collective efforts of the Pakistani Government, UN agencies, international NGOs, and local relief organisations, the response has achieved major successes and seen millions of Pakistanis receive vital emergency relief. However, the disaster is not over and many people still need humanitarian assistance. Ongoing emergency relief is just the first step in rebuilding devastated communities. A nationally-led, pro-poor reconstruction programme is needed now to create a path of sustainable development leading to a fairer and more disaster-resilient Pakistan.

Map of floods



PAK339

Executive summary

Six months after the flood disaster began, this briefing paper evaluates the humanitarian response so far, the continuing crisis, and the challenges that lie ahead. It looks at the immediate reconstruction task, as well as the underlying socio-economic and political issues that need to be tackled by the Government of Pakistan, backed by the international aid community, in order to help vulnerable Pakistanis rebuild stronger, safer communities and a more equitable and self-reliant country.

The huge floods that began in July 2010 were without precedent. **The people of Pakistan have shown resilience, strength, and generosity of spirit against remarkable challenges.** Now more than ever, the needs of the people must be put at the heart of the recovery. Building on the current humanitarian response, **a nationally-led, pro-poor reconstruction and development plan must lead the way.** By resetting priorities to tackle the underlying inequities that keep so many people poor and vulnerable, the disaster can be turned into a **transformative moment** for Pakistan. It is time to get down to business: steering the trajectory of Pakistan towards sustainable, comprehensive, pro-poor development and growth.

The size and scale of the disaster is difficult to conceive. Approximately 20 million people were affected, 14 million of whom have needed urgent humanitarian assistance. Floodwaters inundated up to one-fifth of the country (an area larger than all of England and affecting the same number of people as the population of Australia), partially or wholly destroying more than 1.6 million homes and causing approximately \$10bn of direct and indirect losses – half of which were borne by the agricultural sector alone.¹

In the face of severe logistical obstacles, a major relief effort was launched by the Pakistani Government, supported by UN agencies, international NGOs, and local relief organisations, who battled to assist a population engulfed by a sea of contaminated water. Several donor governments and millions of individuals in Pakistan and around the world acted quickly and generously to provide money and relief items.

Thanks to their collective efforts, the response to the floods has achieved significant successes. Many lives have been saved, the spread of disease has been controlled, and millions have received vital assistance. **However, there are still vast humanitarian needs on the ground and serious lessons to be learnt from how the response has been delivered so far.** Now, six months after the floods struck, it is time both to look forward at the challenges of how to build and lead an effective reconstruction programme, and to evaluate the humanitarian response thus far.

Today, the crisis is far from over, particularly in the south of the country. Many areas – notably homesteads and agricultural land – remain under water or cut off. There is a widespread lack of adequate shelter, malnutrition rates are high, and many of those who are still displaced do not have the means to return home, or anywhere to return to. For those affected by conflict in the north of the country, the floods have had a double impact. Already vulnerable as hosts or displaced people, their resilience has been tested once again. Yet the federal government is ceasing emergency relief operations in most areas from 31 January 2011, putting at risk large numbers of Pakistanis who still require assistance. Moreover, with the next planting season looming, time is running out for landlords, government authorities, and the aid community to help damaged farming communities to recover and thus prevent a secondary food crisis that would result in yet more families sliding into destitution, debt, and hunger.

Emergency relief is just the first step in a comprehensive programme of reconstruction and reform that is now required. Rather than lurch from one disaster to the next, now is the time to rebuild Pakistan in a strategic way that tackles long-term problems not only on paper, but in practice. The floods and the flaws in the response to them have highlighted long-term problems that leave millions of Pakistanis poor and vulnerable to shocks, as well as weaknesses in the country's capacity to respond to them. The central government's current approach of cutting development budgets in half and focusing on the cash disbursement scheme in the reconstruction phase is likely to leave many underlying issues unresolved. Instead, **the momentum of the current floods response must be increased** through the urgent repair of infrastructure and key irrigation systems, significant land and agriculture reforms, building good-quality basic services that are accessible to all, and protecting communities from further disasters through locally-led disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation measures. The meaningful participation of flood-affected communities will be key to any plan's success. A watchful and engaged civil society can encourage the good governance that is necessary to build a strong, just, and prosperous country.

Notes

1 According to the preliminary Damage and Needs Assessment by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, November 2010. Some aid actors and Pakistani officials believe that the actual figures are higher. Shelter Cluster Meeting Summary, 11 January 2011, gives an example of the kind of discrepancies: 'The DNA figures were introduced in mid-November but have proved to display big discrepancies when compared to the PDMA figures at district level. Field investigations by NDMA in early January 2011 have confirmed the veracity of the PDMA figures. For example, in Dadu the DNA figures detail 24,000 damaged or destroyed homes, while the PDMA figures describe 168,000.'

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